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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 3337
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 5674
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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 0784
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 1199
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000116

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Gaza Crisis

Key stories in the media:

HaQaretz reported that a memorandum of understanding between the U.S. and Israel on security and intelligence cooperation aimed at countering the smuggling of arms into Gaza is being prepared and may be signed as early as Friday.

The media reported that Hamas announced yesterday that it had accepted the Egyptian cease-fire initiative Qin principleQ and that it was now awaiting IsraelQs response. HaQaretz quoted senior Hamas officials in Cairo as saying that the group is still demanding clarifications on a number of issues.

Maariv quoted outgoing PM Ehud Olmert as saying that it would be better not to expand the Gaza operation. HaQaretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday officials close to Olmert blasted DM Ehud Barak for comments in yesterday's HaQaretz in support of a week-long "humanitarian cease-fire" in the Gaza Strip. Other media filed similar reports. Yediot reported that Olmert has presented intelligence showing that BarakQs comments that the operation has Qexhausted itselfQ toughen HamasQs stance.

Israel Radio reported that this morning Israel shelled UNRWA offices in Gaza City and that DM Barak later apologized to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Maariv and Israel Radio quoted Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as saying that OlmertQs comments about the U.S. vote on UN Security Resolution 1860 were Qfiction.

Yediot quoted President-elect Barack Obama as saying in an interview with CBS-TV that he will intervene in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the first day he is elected and that he would involve Syria in the talks.

Israel Radio quoted Palestinian sources as saying that seven Palestinians were killed in two separate incidents. Media reported that 1,033 Palestinians were killed and 4,560 wounded in the operation. Israel Hayom quoted the IDF as saying that only around 150 of the dead were not identified as Hamas fighters. Seven IDF soldiers were wounded in the Gaza fighting yesterday. Leading media reported that Hamas launched a first phosphorus mortar at a Negev town.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, due to increased pressure by international agencies, the IDF has tightened its rules of engagement regarding Palestinian ambulances suspected of being involved in terrorist activity.

HaQaretz reported that the IDF has set up a team of 120 Qhumanitarian officersQ to coordinate aid for the civilian Palestinian population. HaQaretz reported that the Foreign Ministry has created a special task force to prepare for the aftermath of the IDFQs Gaza operation. The team will submit proposals on two of the army's main concerns -- Iran and Hamas taking control of Gaza's postwar reconstruction and the harm the offensive has caused to Israel's image abroad. The goal is to allow the PA, as well as Arab and international entities, to lead reconstruction efforts and funding and get credit for Gaza's rehabilitation instead of Hamas or Iran. Yediot quoted Lorenzo Cremonesi of the Italian daily Corriere Della Sera, the only Western journalist who entered Gaza, as saying that Gazans do not lack food or medicine.

HaQaretz reported that a protest against the offensive in Gaza will be held tomorrow in the Negev village of Arara. The protest, organized by the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee, will be the third to be held since the start of Operation Cast Lead.

Leading media reported that in a radio address that appeared on Web sites yesterday, Osama bin Ladin called for a new jihad in response to the Israeli offensive in Gaza.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday a coalition of local human rights organizations warned that Gaza was on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe. The coalition was quoted as saying that after the fighting it would be necessary to start inquiries into what it alleged were war crimes in Gaza.

Media reported that late Monday night and early yesterday morning the Israel Navy prevented an Iranian ship from anchoring in GazaQs port and unloading its cargo. Israel Radio reported that Bolivia and Venezuela have severed their ties with Israel.

HaQaretz quoted an Islamic Web site regarding the unusual report

about Saudi jihadist Abu Muhammed Mari, who was killed while fighting Israel alongside Hamas militants in Gaza. HaQaretz said that this appears to indicate that Hamas may be gaining greater acceptance among even more fundamentalist Muslim groups.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe front-paged an appeal to President Bush to release convicted spy Jonathan Pollard.

HaQaretz published the results of a Dialogue poll:

QIs the Gaza operation a success or a failure?

78%: a success; 13%: a failure; 9% are undecided.

82% believe that Israel has not Qgone too farQ with the military force it is exercising against Hamas.

Kadima and Likud have weakened slightly and would get 29 and 25 Knesset seats, respectively, if the elections were held today.

Labor is holding steady with 16 seats. The right-wing bloc still commands more support than the center and left wing. However, Benjamin NetanyahuQs coalition would be difficult to manage and possibly short-lived.

The Jerusalem Post presented the results of a Tel Aviv University poll according to which 94% of the public support or strongly support the Gaza operation while 92% think it benefits IsraelQs security. The poll found that 92% of Israeli Jews believe the air forceQs attacks in Gaza are justified despite the suffering of the civilian population in Gaza and the damage they cause to infrastructure. The poll said that 85% of Israeli Arabs oppose the operation.

Gaza Crisis:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QIsrael views [the arms smuggling prevention] agreement as a Qfoot in the doorQ of the Obama administration, which will have to respect its predecessorQs legacy.

Ha'aretz editorialized: QOlmert's behavior is another reason for the immediate cessation of the military campaign, before Israel finds itself embroiled in a situation from which it will have difficulty getting out.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QIf Israel's fundamental needs are met, how the Palestinians choose to govern themselves in Gaza is their own affair.... [This being said], no deal is better than a bad deal.

Block Quotes:

II. "Between Washington and Cairo"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (1/15): QThe calendar is tight: Condoleezza Rice is leaving her job and the State Department on Friday Q- the last day when she can sign treaties with Livni. At the core of the document that was drafted during this last week is a first-of-its-kind commitment by the U.S. to fight smuggling of arms of any kind and in all ways to Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in Gaza. Until now smuggling was handled as a side issue. Israel is now asking for a detailed U.S. commitment to curb it at sea and on land, exchange intelligence, and handle the interface with the future states. Israel views this agreement as a Qfoot in the doorQ of the Obama administration, which will have to respect its predecessorQs legacy. U.S. Defense Secretary Bill Gates, who will remain in office after the transition, shares the contacts over the agreement. The Israeli-American agreement is meant as a layer in a stable cease-fire; this is why it is clear that the outgoing administration will not sign it without a mutual Israeli pledge that if there indeed is a cease-fire, this move can be seen as an attempt by Livni to grant Olmert a diplomatic achievement that would serve as an exit from the Gaza operation. The talks with the Egyptians will demand precious time; they might

resume after the cease-fire.

II. "Defective Judgment"

Ha'aretz editorialized (1/15): QSeveral recent events stir doubts about the quality of the Prime Minister's judgment. In conducting the war.... American support is a vital asset for Israel, particularly at the height of a military campaign that is not supported by the international community, which is calling for it to end. The Prime Minister's description to the effect that Bush does his bidding embarrasses the President and damages the authority of the U.S. Secretary of State at a time when their support is of utmost importance for Israel. The public condemnation of Olmert is also seen as an expression of dissatisfaction with the continuation of the fighting and the contempt for the Security Council's decision. Olmert's behavior is another reason for the immediate cessation of the military campaign, before Israel finds itself embroiled in a situation from which it will have difficulty getting out.

III. "Remember the Mission"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (1/15): QIt is essential that Israel not lose sight of the minimum it should be getting before Operation Cast Lead ends. The smuggling must stop.... There must be an end to shooting at Israel, and to infiltration attempts. The cease-fire must have no time-limit.... Hamas must become more reasonable on the Gilad Shalit issue.... Regardless of who runs Gaza, Egypt must keep tight control of its side of the Rafah border. When it comes to entry and egress, the buck stops with Cairo. There can be absolutely no Turkish or other foreign troops on the Palestinian side of the border. Such a presence would hamper any necessary IDF activity. The foreigners can operate on the Egyptian side, if Cairo desires. If Israel's fundamental needs are met, how the Palestinians choose to govern themselves in Gaza is their own affair. Israel, for its part, will open crossing points to everything excepting materiel that can be used for military purposes. The embargo, for all intents and purposes, would be over. On day 1 of this war, Ehud Barak declared that its mission was to put an end to Hamas aggression. Nothing short of achieving this goal should bring Israel's efforts to a permanent halt. No deal is better than a bad deal. If Hamas insists on fighting on, Israeli decision-makers will need to weigh when and how to mobilize our society for the prolonged, all-out assault needed to uproot the Islamist menace.

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